

# BLUE BERET



## UNMAS at work: Towards a mine-free Cyprus

Cyprus remains contaminated with landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) as a result of inter-communal violence in 1963-64 and the events of 1974. The precise scope of contamination is unknown and further survey is needed to accurately define the problem. As of mid-November 2017, UNFICYP data indicates there are at least 54 “suspected hazardous areas” that require survey to assess whether clearance is needed; more than 2.6 million square meters (m<sup>2</sup>) of land may be contaminated with an estimate of more than 7,000 mines.

At the request of UNFICYP, the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) initiated a new programme in Cyprus on 1 July 2016 to support UNFICYP activities. During its first year, UNMAS activities, which were implemented by a team from “Mines Advisory Group”, focused primarily on technical surveys (TS) and clearance of minefields that were identified when President Anastasiades shared maps of 28 former National Guard (NG) minefields with the leader of the TkCyp community as part of a package of confidence building measures (CBMs) in May 2015. The UNMAS programme is continuing in 2017-18 to build upon the success achieved the first year.

The demining team has worked carefully and diligently in the buffer zone and in the north since its arrival. Its work has made an important contribution to helping UNFICYP implement its mandate as well as assisted in making progress towards the shared goal for both communities of a mine-free Cyprus. Through UNMAS activities, the threat of mines and ERW was removed in areas where it conducted activities, living conditions were improved, and freedom of movement was made safer for UNFICYP, UN partners, and communities.

UNFICYP Force Commander Major General Mohammad Humayun Kabir told the Blue Beret: “UNMAS has supported key confidence building measures agreed during the 2015-2017 peace talks; the clearance of legacy minefield locations in the north and facilitating the opening of future crossings at Lefka and Dherynia,”

“I commend the excellent work of UNMAS for greatly contributing to the accomplishment of our mandated mission,” he added.

### Some of the team’s noteworthy accomplishments during the past six months include:

- Supporting CBMs between the two communities by completing non-technical surveys of 25 minefields that were included in the list of 28 former NG minefields.
- Completing TSs of five minefields that were included in the list of 28 former NG minefields. In total, the team’s work allowed the safe release of 173,026m<sup>2</sup> of land at four minefields in northern Cyprus and 1,666m<sup>2</sup> at one minefield in the buffer zone.
- Supported force protection by completing battle area clearance in the UN Protected Area adjacent to the runway at the Nicosia International Airport. The demining team released 100,225 m<sup>2</sup> of land adjacent to the UNFICYP flight operations area and declared it free from explosive hazards.
- UNMAS provided mine/ERW awareness training to 15 UN Police Officers and “training of trainers” to 26 UNFICYP officers to help raise their awareness of the threat of mines/ERW and how to operate safely in Cyprus.
- Technical guidance was provided to UNFICYP to help promote dialogue on demining with the two sides.
- Committee on Missing Persons (CMP): The CMP’s vital work in support of reconciliation was facilitated through UNMAS’ operational support at two field locations in northern Cyprus; training for its staff; and technical guidance during mission planning for operations at a new location near a minefield.

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